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ABSTRACT

To determine consumer preference regarding four forms of mass communication, an 18-item questionnaire was devised that asked individuals where they sought information on national and world affairs, local events, entertainment, and shopping (advertising). Results from the 108 respondents in the random sample indicated the following: newspapers provide the best information on shopping and sources of entertainment, as well as the most useful, honest advertising; although television offers the most in entertainment and national and world news, television advertising is annoying and misleading; and while radio and magazines hold a secondary position to the other two media, magazines are the best source of information on durable goods. (MAI)

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CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF THE MEDIA AND THEIR ADVERTISING CONTENT

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ABSTRACT

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This study indicates that consumers have very definite ideas about the media and their advertising content. They believe for example that newspapers are the best source of shopping information; the best source of information about sources of entertainment and that they contain the most useful advertisements of the four media included in this study. They also feel that newspaper advertisements are the most truthful and informative, and would be least willing to give up the advertising content of their newspaper when compared to the other media included in this study.

When it comes to television this group indicates that it spends the greatest amount of its media time with television, and that television is their first choice for entertainment and for world and national news. While this group feels that television advertising is the most annoying, insulting, misleading and most in need of government regulation, they also feel it is the most entertaining and the best source of new product news.

Radio and magazines appear to hold a very secondary position in the mind of the consumer vis-a-vis television and newspapers. While this group indicates that magazines are the medium they spend the least amount of time with, and the medium they could "do without," they are also the medium which provides the best source of information on durable goods in their opinion.

CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF THE MEDIA AND THEIR ADVERTISING CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

How do consumers view and use the various media of mass communication when seeking information on national and world affairs; local events; entertainment, and shopping information? How do they perceive the advertising content of the various media in terms of its information and entertainment value? Do they have specific expectation patterns when seeking specific kinds of information?

These and similar questions have been raised time and again with regard to consumer utilization of the content of the major media of mass communication. And, in an effort to answer some of these questions a growing body of information is beginning to develop. Studies such as the one by American Association of Advertising Agencies indicated that newspapers are the public's favorite advertising medium,[1] while the study by Grotta, et. al. indicated that for the small town daily newspaper the audience was primarily interested in local news content.[2] Other studies which have contributed to these insights into the audience's perception of the newspaper and the other media of mass communication include those by Larkin and Grotta which indicated that consumers consider the advertising content of the daily newspaper to be information in much the same manner they perceive the local news as information which is of value to them,[3] and their later study which indicated that the newspaper serves as a primary source of consumer-information for young adults.[4]

While studies such as these have concentrated primarily on the newspaper, others have attempted to gain similar insights into the consumer's perceptions of television, magazine, and radio. For example the study by

Larkin on "How College Students Say They View and Use the Mass Media"[5] attempted to determine not only how they used newspapers but also television and the other media. Evidence from this study indicated that the respondents had very definite ideas about which media would provide the best source of specific types of information and also which media would provide the best source for advertising which would help them in making specific purchase decisions.

While the study of college students provided some insights into their attitudes toward and use of the major mass media, some concern was voiced over the representativeness of this group, vis-a-vis the non-student consumer population. Therefore, in an effort to discover how the non-student consumer perceived and used the same media the following study was conducted.

METHODOLOGY

A random sample of 150 individuals was drawn from the telephone directory of a Southwestern city of 80,000. A mail questionnaire was used to elicit information from this sample concerning their attitudes toward the various media, and their stated use of the media with regard to information on news and advertising. These consumers were asked to respond to eighteen questions concerning their attitudes toward the four major media of mass communication--newspapers, television, radio and magazines--and toward their advertising content.

A series of three seperate mailings was made to non-respondents which resulted in a total of 108 usable responses or a 72% response rate from the sample. Based on these responses the following information concerning consumers' attitudes toward the media and their advertising content was derived.

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the pattern of responses given by the respondents across

the eighteen questions on the instrument. In summary, the findings indicated that:

1. Time Spent with the Media. The consumers indicated that of the four media in question they spent the greatest amount of time with television with 50% selecting this as their first choice. Radio and newspapers were second and third respectively with 24% indicating radio and 23% indicating newspapers as the medium with which they spent the greatest amount of time. Magazines drew only 4% of the total number of respondents as their first choice.

2. Source of Entertainment. When asked which of the four media they turned to for entertainment television was again the first choice of 85% of the consumers questioned. Radio was a distant second with 11% and magazines third with 3%. None of the consumers in this survey indicated newspapers as their first choice.

3. Source of Shopping Information. When asked to indicate the media they would turn to for information on where to find the best buys on clothing, food, etc., the respondents were almost unanimous in their choice of newspapers with 99% indicating this as their first choice.

4. Source of World & National News. When asked where they would be most apt to turn to for news of world and national events the majority of respondents indicated television as their choice, with a total of 61% opting for this source. Newspapers drew a total of only 19% and radio only 14% of the total.

5. Entertainment Information. When asked where they would turn for information on sources of entertainment such as movies, etc., 99% of the consumers again indicated that newspapers would be their first choice.

6. Least Used Medium. When asked which of the four media they spend the least time with the respondents indicated that magazines were the least

used with 48% opting for this choice, while 32% opted for radio. Only 8% said that television was the least used of the four media.

7. Media I Could Do Without. When asked which media they would be most willing to give up if they had to make a choice 56% opted for magazine while 18% indicated television, putting this medium in second place among the four mentioned. Only 9% said they would be willing to give up newspapers.

In a series of questions dealing with the advertising content of the four previously mentioned media these consumers had some very definite ideas about their preferences and perceptions of the content of each of the media.

1. Most Useful Advertising. When asked which of the media contained the most "useful" advertising 72% indicated newspapers with 16% opting for magazines and 10% for television. Radio only drew 3% of the total response.

2. Most Annoying Advertisements. The medium with the most annoying or intrusive advertising according to the respondents was television with 79% indicating it as first choice. Second choice was radio with 11% and third was magazine with 8%. Only 2% indicated they felt advertising in newspapers was annoying.

3. Most Insulting Ads. Television again was indicated as the medium with the most "insulting" ads by this group of consumers with a total of 82% opting for this choice. Magazines and radio tied for second with 8% each. None of the respondents indicated newspapers as their choice.

4. Most Informative Ads. As indicated by other studies, newspaper advertising is considered to be the most informative by 56% of the respondents in this study. The second choice was magazine with 29% and third choice was television with 11%.

5. Most Entertaining Ads. Over half of the respondents in this study said television ads were the most entertaining with 59% opting for this

choice. The second most entertaining was magazine with 22% voting for this medium and third was radio with 14%. Only 2% felt that newspapers had the most entertaining ads.

6. Most Misleading Ads. Television once again won first place for the most misleading advertising in the eyes of the respondents in this study with 68% indicating it as their first choice. Newspapers were their second choice with 12% indicating this as their choice.

7. Most Truthful Ads. While 12% of the respondents felt that newspaper advertising was misleading, 59% felt that it was the most truthful, thus making it the first choice among the four media in question. Magazines were second with 19% and television was third with 11% of the total.

8. Do Away with Advertising in This Medium. When asked which of the media they would most like to see without advertising the consumers in this study favored television by 60%, followed by radio with 18% and magazines by 9%. Only 2% indicated they would like a newspaper without advertising.

9. Durable Product News. When asked where they would go to get information on which products are most durable or dependable 60% of the respondents indicated magazines, while 30% indicated newspapers as their choice. Only 7% indicated television and no one picked radio.

10. New Product News. If consumers look to magazines and newspapers for information on product durability they turn to television to find out what new products are on the market. Over 50% indicated television as the source of such information with 23% opting for magazine and 14% for newspapers.

The final question in this study dealt with attitudes toward regulation of advertising. The respondents were asked to indicate their choice of the medium which was most in need of government regulation of its advertising content. The overwhelming choice of these consumers was television

with 71% indicating this option. Only 9% opted for magazines; 3% for radio and 3% for newspapers.

SUMMARY

It is evident from the foregoing that consumers have very definite ideas about the media and their advertising content. They believe for example that newspapers are the best source of shopping information; the best source of information on sources of entertainment and that they contain the most useful advertisements of the four media included in this study. They also feel that newspaper advertisements are the most truthful and informative, and would be least willing to give up the advertising content of thier newspaper when compared to the other media included in this study.

When it comes to television this group indicates that it spends the greatest amount of its media time with television, and that television is their first choice for entertainment and for world and national news. While this group feels that television advertising is the most annoying, insulting, misleading and most in need of government regulation, they also find it the most entertaining and the best source of new product news.

Radio and magazines appear to hold a very secondary position in the mind of the consumer vis-a-vis television and newspapers. While magazines are the medium they indicate spending the least amount of time with, and the medium they could "do without," they are also the medium which provides the best source of information on durable goods.

Based on the foregoing it is evident that the consumers in this study tend to have very specific uses for each of the major media of mass communication, with each playing a specific role in their total media usage pattern. Such evidence should help both media managers and advertisers gain a better understanding of the expectations of the consumers when they come to each of the media seeking either entertainment or information.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Staff, "Newspapers are Public's Favorite Ad Medium," Editor and Publishers, March 29, 1975, p. 12.

2. Grot ta, Gerald L., Ernest F. Larkin, and Barbara DePlois, "Hometown Daily Newspaper Means 'Local' to Readers," Oklahoma Journalism Reports, Vol. 5, No. 1, (Winter 1977), pp 1-4.

3. Larkin, Ernest F., and Gerald L. Grotta, "Consumer Attitudes Toward and Use of Advertising Content of a Small Daily Newspaper," Journal of Advertising, Vol 5, No. 1 (Winter 1976) pp. 28-31.

4. Larkin, Ernest F., and Gerald L. Grotta, "The Newspaper as a Source of Consumer Information for Young Adults," Journal of Advertising, Vol. 6, No. 4, (Fall 1977) pp. 5-10

5. Larkin, Ernest F., "How College Students Say They View and Use the Mass Media," International Newspaper Promotion Association Research Newsletter, October 1976, pp. 2-5.

Table 1 Media Usage Survey

	PERCENT RESPONDING			
	Newspapers	TV	Radio	Magazine
1. Of all the time I spend with the media I spend most if it with....	23	50	24	4
2. When I want to be entertained I usually turn to....	0	85	11	3
3. When I want information on where to find the best bargains on clothing, food, etc. I turn to....	99	0	1	0
4. When I want the latest news about world and national events I usually turn to...	19	61	14	6
5. When I want information on sources of entertainment such as movies, etc. I turn to....	99	1	0	0
6. Of all the time I spend with the media the one I spend the least time with is....	11	8	32	48
7. If I had to "do without" one of the major media I would be most willing to give up...	9	18	17	56
8. When it comes to advertising I think the most useful advertisements are to be found in..	72	10	3	16
9. I think the most annoying ads are found in..	2	79	11	8
10. I think the most insulting ads are found in..	0	82	8	8
11. I think the most informative ads are found in	56	11	2	29
12. I think the most entertaining ads are found in	2	59	14	22
13. I think the most misleading ads are found in	12	68	6	7
14. I think the most truthful ads are found in...	59	11	5	19
15. Of all the media I would most like to see them do away with advertising in....	2	60	18	9
16. If I wanted information on which products are the most durable or dependable I would turn to	30	7	0	60
17. When a new product is introduced I usually find out about it from....	14	59	2	23
18. Of all the media the one I think most needs some kind of government regulation of its advertising content....	3	71	3	9